

American Media Coverage of War, Conflict, and Violence in Western vs “Non-Western”
Countries.

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Literature Review

Preface

Media has the power to connect the stories and experiences of people around the world. For many, it serves as their first point of reference on global events and issues. Growing up in a household where both of my parents worked in the news and media industry, I gravitated towards the field at an early age. Although I was young, I have memories of my mom traveling to rural areas of Nepal as she reported on the on-going civil war in the country. I vividly remember watching Christianne Ammanpour's coverage of the war in the Middle East in the early 2000's. Learning about the fundamental values of war reporting has allowed me to understand the importance and sacrifice of journalists and war correspondents. After moving to the United States, I quickly realized that the way the American media portrays conflict, violence, and war in the global south in comparison to the global north differs. I realized how the news media and its coverage plays a large role in how the public perceives wars, conflicts, and violence abroad. Most importantly, it impacts the way we perceive these countries and its people in general. The way that media reports on communities, people, and cultural identities impacts the way the rest of the world perceives them.

In this research, I will refer to the predominantly White, European countries as "Western" countries and predominantly non-White, Middle Eastern/South Asian countries as "non-Western". The term "non-Western" is an American constructed term that essentially lumps countries in the Middle East, Central and South Asia together. The term "non-Western" is adequate for this thesis because the American media usually groups countries in these regions together. Additionally, it also fails to differentiate between Muslim-majority, South Asian

countries and Arab countries. I will be analyzing if there is bias in the way in which the American media covers wars in Western countries in comparison to “non-Western” countries. Specifically, I will conduct a case study by comparing two specific conflicts, one based in a Western country and one in a “non-Western” country. The conflict I chose to study in the Western country is the ongoing war in Ukraine and the conflict I chose for the “non-Western” country is the war in Afghanistan. Although there has not been a lot of literature on specifically the coverage of Ukraine because it is a recent and on-going conflict, there are enough articles and images that I can examine to support my hypothesis. I argue that there is evidence for apparent bias which is present in the coverage of “non-Western” countries.

Introduction

News media and news analysis done by prominent reporters has proven to be “the greatest mover” of public opinion and perception (Moore, 2016, p.9). How people shape their attitudes and perspectives about a war is largely shaped by the information they receive. As powerful and important of a tool news media is, it can also cause harm if the information isn’t accurate or complete. The American media ecosystem is currently with news updates, analysis and reports from the on-going Russian invasion of Ukraine. On Feb. 24 2022, we witnessed Russia begin what is now over a year-long war with Ukraine. American journalists and war correspondents like Clarissa Ward, Anderson Cooper, Jim Sciutto from *CNN*, Richard Engel from *MSNBC*, and Trey Yingst from *Fox News*, amongst others, have all traveled to the country to report on the situation as it escalated. Many traveled to neighboring countries like Poland to report on the Ukrainian refugees who fled to the country for safety. American media began calling the Ukraine-Russia war “Putin’s War.” Concurrently, President Joe Biden’s announcement on July 8, 2021 regarding his decision to withdraw all U.S. troops from

Afghanistan ended the longstanding US military presence in Afghanistan, but also allowed the Taliban to retake Kabul and reestablish itself as the sovereign ruler of Afghanistan. The American media's coverage of the chaos in Afghanistan largely focused on American politics and the humanitarian crisis. While that is incredibly important to cover and highlight, what they failed to cover was America's role being a factor in the reason behind the chaos. There were mixed reactions to the Biden Administration's decision, yet they failed to recognize the political, social and cultural history that enabled the Taliban to seize control of the country. Americans agree on the importance of freedom of the press and the media serving as the 'watchdog' of the government, but those sentiments are less popular during wartime (Seib, 2004, p. 30). Public opinions like these make it difficult for journalists to cover war because if the public is rejecting how war is being covered; "anti-media" feelings tend to increase which can result in the news network or publication losing its audience (Seib, 2004, p. 30). In such cases, it is vital journalists and war correspondents remain unintimidated by government officials and the public perceptions to maintain the ability to report on topics objectively. Allowing public opinion to alter the way media reports on controversial subjects raises the possibility of misleading or incomplete information being published.

Prior research on this topic points towards a bias existing in American media's coverage. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, there have been remarks from reporters and other prominent figures that point towards bias and perpetuate a narrative. While referring to the conflict in Ukraine, a CBS reporter Charlie D'Agata said, "[Ukraine] isn't a place, with all due respect, like Iraq or Afghanistan, that has seen conflict raging for decades. This is a relatively civilized, relatively European – I have to choose those words carefully, too – city, one where you wouldn't expect that, or hope that it's going to happen" (Bayoumi, 2022). Statements like these imply that

war, conflict, violence and humanitarian crises are almost inevitable in “non-Western” countries and are unheard of in “relatively European” ones. The American mainstream media devote more attention to some countries, especially wealthy, powerful and culturally similar countries, that tend to receive more attention. According to Hawkins (2011), when it comes to conflict, many of the issues in “non-Western” countries are often the most ignored because the American media pays attention to conflicts in selective countries with political significance, close proximity (geographically and culturally), and political and national interests for Americans (Scott, Rosati, 1993, p. 425). News coverage in the U.S. tends to be more American and Western centric. Additionally, issues in developing countries receive little to no coverage, and when they are covered, are more sensationalized (Scott, Rosati, 1993, p. 425). The intent of this thesis is not to defend Russia nor is it to claim that American media should not be highlighting the atrocities of Putin. Rather, I aim to lend broader insight into how the coverage of Ukraine differs in comparison to the coverage of Afghanistan. It is vital as journalists, we recognize that news coverage has the ability to create heroes and villains and has the ability to raise questions about actions both in direct and subtle ways (Seib, 2004, p. 24).

U.S.-Afghanistan History

In order to understand the significance of the way American media covers “non-Western” countries, particularly countries in the Middle East, we must first understand the political history between the United States and the Middle East. In 1979, American Ambassador Adolph Dubs was assassinated in Kabul, Afghanistan. In 1989, following the departure of the Soviet forces, the American Embassy was closed in 1989 due to security concerns for diplomats. In 2001, the United States established the American Liaison Office in Kabul (U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan). While tensions have always been present between the two regions, it has undoubtedly increased

after the 9/11 attacks. It is considered the largest terrorist attack on American soil, and it was no question that America would double down to protect itself from another attack. The Bush administration deployed U.S. troops to Afghanistan as an effort to defeat Al-Qaeda and the Taliban (Council on Foreign Council, 2022). In his remarks, President Biden stated that the United States went to Afghanistan to “get the terrorists who attacked us on 9/11 and to deliver justice to Osama Bin Laden, and to degrade the terrorist threat to keep Afghanistan from becoming a base from which attacks could not be continued against the United States” (The White House, 2021). The United States has spent \$2.6 trillion dollars in Afghanistan since 2001 (Sabga, 2021). Despite the United States’ trillions of dollars of military expenditure, and 20 years in Afghanistan, the country still has one of the smallest economies in the world (Sabga, 2021). Biden administration’s decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan has further pushed the country to collapse and the Taliban’s rise back to power.

United States’ alliance with Ukraine

In recent history, the United States has largely been allies with European countries, and Ukraine is no exception; especially when it comes to the Russia-Ukraine war. American lawmakers and other politicians have publically supported the importance of the United States’ aid and assistance to Ukraine. Their diplomatic relationship began in 1991 following Ukraine’s independence from the Soviet Union (U.S. Department of State, 2021). The United States’ policies prioritizes supporting Ukraine against the Russian aggression and maintains its stance on not recognizing Russia’s “attempted annexation of Crimea” (U.S. Department of State, 2021). President Biden controversially stated that Putin cannot remain in power. The White House quickly clarified the comment saying Biden meant Putin “cannot be allowed to exercise power over his neighbors or the region” (Montanaro, 2022). The United States Secretary of State

Antony Blinken stated that there is bipartisan support for Ukraine and its sovereignty and that the United States will continue economic and military assistance (Carpenter, 2021). So far, the Biden Administration has sent Ukraine \$19.3 billion in aid (U.S. Department of State, 2022). The United States' solidarity with Ukraine is important in this context because it impacts the American media's approach to reporting the war.

Bias in reporting: General to specific

If we look at how refugees are covered, past research has shown that news media primarily focuses on Western countries and perspectives (Alhayek, 2019, p. 4). The notion of Western media establishing global hierarchies of people and places is not new (Joye, 2009, p. 46). There's been tons of research on this subject and most of the findings have almost always concluded that when it comes to general reporting on developing nations, "Western news media do not attribute much newsworthiness to countries of developing world as their coverage of international and foreign events is often nationalistic" (Joye, 2009, p. 46). Western media primarily focuses on events, elite persons, violence, and conflict which results in perpetuating stereotypes and inadequate reporting of those countries. (Joye, 2009, p. 46). For example, if we look at how disasters in foreign countries are covered by Western media, the representations of developing, "non-Western" countries are usually rooted in colonialism or are ideologically driven. This adds on to the issue of perpetuating stereotypical portrayal of the 'Other'" (Joye, 2009, p. 48). The concept of the 'Other' was first coined by Simone de Beauvoir, a feminist author. 'Othering' is a concept in which a group sets itself up as the 'Self' and those not in the group as the 'Other'. (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 16). The group cannot set itself as the 'Self' or the dominant without setting the 'Other' over against itself (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 16). The portrayal of people in these developing nations are often reduced to being the 'Other' to people in Western

countries. Media representation plays a huge role in the possibility of invoking feelings of empathy or compassion. Media also plays a huge role in contributing to compassion fatigue which is essentially the indifference of those who are suffering due to overexposure. Compassion is important because it opens up the possibility of peoples' willingness to help and/or care about the people experiencing violence or oppression in those countries. Because the violence of those particularly in "non-Western" countries is one of the most common theme in the coverage of "non-Western" countries such as Afghanistan, it not only increases the notion of compassion fatigue, it also desensitizes the West to the violence and conflict those in the developing, "non-Western" countries experience and live through.

Ukraine War Coverage

When Russia invaded Ukraine, the international community immediately voiced concerns about it potentially escalating to a much larger, multi-state conflict. Almost all NATO countries and many countries in the U.N. condemned Russia's attack. Ukraine's President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, utilized social media as a tool to inform Ukrainians on war updates. The U.S. media has covered this war and Zelenskyy's unique and modern-day use of social media through-out and has labeled him 'heroic'. When Ukrainian men and women took up arms to defend themselves, U.S. media have largely supported their right to sovereignty. The conflict in Ukraine was largely reported as a fight for democracy and the right to sovereignty. A *CNN* article stated that if Ukraine falls, Russia will be able to establish the principle that an authoritarian country is able to simply invade a smaller country, therefore it is important to help Ukraine as they are fighting for democracy itself (Collinson, 2022). News media's political stance also largely shapes its viewer's stances. For example, American news networks like *CNN* and *MSNBC* largely supported the use of no-fly zones in their analysis and coverage of the war. Networks like *Fox*

News on the other hand, did not. The difference in coverage furthered the partisan divide and had the ability to influence viewers' political perspectives. According to data from Brookings, viewers who consumed news from Fox tended to be less supportive of the no-fly zone in comparison to other major news outlets (Telhami, 2022). In general, Republican viewers of *Fox News* showed similar levels of support as Republican politicians and Democratic viewers of *MSNBC* showed similar levels of support of a no-fly zone in Ukraine as Democratic politicians. Therefore, showing that American news media has a direct influence on American foreign (and domestic) politics. *NBC* news host Chuck Todd categorized Russia's invasion of Ukraine as an issue of "good versus evil". News media at-large have labeled Russia as "evil" and Putin as an "aggressor" and an "oligarch". This is not to say Putin's political motives and the illegal invasion of Ukraine should not be criticized. However, the main underlying issue is that coverage like this exposes the stark contrast in coverage when similar political situations unfold in a "non-Western" country. According to a Massachusetts Speech Action case study, in the first week of the Ukraine-Russia war coverage by major media outlets such as *ABC*, *CBS*, and *NBC*, out of 234 total sources 119 were Ukrainian, 80 were American and 20 were Russian (Nicoloff, 2022). This is significantly different if we look at how the situation in the Middle East is covered. For example, only 8% of Iraqi civilians were sources during the U.S. invasion of Iraq. (Nicoloff, 2022). Additionally, after the U.S. withdrew its troops from Afghanistan, even fewer Afghan sources' voices have been highlighted in its coverage.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, many reporters in prominent news outlets have made remarks that demonstrate implicit bias. While referring to the horrific scenes in Ukraine, they have often made it a point to emphasize that the conflict in Ukraine is something that only occurs in developing countries, but is unheard of in Europe. For example, Lucy Watson, a reporter for

Britain's ITV said that Ukraine is "Europe" and not a "developing third world nation" and something like this in Europe is "unimaginable" (Ellison, Andrews, 2022). Even news media not based in the West like Al Jazeera, described Ukrainian refugees as "prosperous, middle-class people," and not like other refugees that are trying to flee from areas in North Africa (Allsop, 2022). In another instance, Kelly Cobiella, a news correspondent for *NBC News* stated that Ukrainian refugees are not the same refugees from Syria. She claimed that the Ukrainian refugees are Christians, white, and Western (Chauhan, 2022). The suffering or oppression of marginalized groups is not providing insightful information, critical feedback or helping educate viewers. Rather, it dehumanizes the experiences of the 'Other' group. In a *BBC* news segment, the former deputy prosecutor general of Ukraine, David Sakvarelidze, went on to describe his distraught over the situation in his country claiming that "European people with blue eyes and blonde hair being killed, children killed everyday," makes him emotional (Ellison, Andrews, 2022). While his emotions are understandable, the casual racism and the blatant implications that the suffering of Black and Brown people being inevitable or normal, is not. It is noteworthy that the *BBC* anchor in the segment did not go on to state that explicitly or correct Sakvarelidze's remarks.

Disparities in reporting have its roots in implicit bias and often racism. Philip Seib, scholar and journalist, said that one of the most interesting examples of this was in the 1990's when white people were killed in the Balkans and Black people were killed in Rwanda but the Balkans got significantly more coverage. "There seems to be a gravitational pull leading to more Western coverage of people who are 'like us' to use their term," (Ellison, Andrews, 2022). During the coverage of Ukraine, this is exactly the kind of language that was used by many journalists in the Western media. There is something to be said about covering stories that the

public “at-home” is more interested in tuning in. Seib claims “news organizations’ American constituencies feel closer to their roots in Europe” (Ellison, Andrews, 2022). Oftentimes, coverage of something that is happening in a Western European country is much more intense because the public interest is more intense as well (Ellison, Andrews, 2022).

However, the issue is not just that conflict in “non-Western” countries isn’t covered enough, the issue is also that when these countries are covered, it is oftentimes inaccurate or misrepresented. The inconsistencies and bias in reporting stem from the practice of what is called parachute journalism. Parachute journalism is the notion where a journalist goes to a foreign country or a town for a short period of time to report on a news event but they are unlikely to have sufficient knowledge regarding the area’s political and cultural environment (Martin, 2011). Parachute journalism is beneficial and can add to one’s understanding of international issues if the journalist has adequate prep time for the reporting (Martin, 2011). More often than not, war correspondents or international correspondents are given a time constraint to produce news which restricts them from having enough time to do adequate research. Therefore, resulting in misrepresentation or bias in coverage. The difference in these coverage allows for people in the West to feel more sympathy towards the conflict and violence in Ukraine while the suffering of people in “non-Western” countries often go overlooked.

Afghanistan War Coverage

The U.S. media covered the war and violence in Afghanistan for two decades. News anchors, war correspondents, and media practices changed but what stayed consistent is the theme in which Afghanistan was covered. American media’s coverage of the war in Afghanistan by and large consisted of common themes of more coverage of American voices i.e military officials, disproportionate emphasis on the lack of infrastructure of the country, and equating the

lack of infrastructure of resources to the lack of civilization or to the lack of humanity. After the Biden administration's decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, the country effectively fell into chaos. We saw images and videos of people desperately trying to flee the country, some even trying to hold onto airplanes as it took off. Rather than prioritizing coverage that was amplifying the voices of locals who were experiencing not only the collapse of their country but their lives, American media quickly turned the coverage all about American politics and who is to blame for the situation. Much-celebrated and prominent news publications such as the *Washington Post*, *CNN*, amongst others, quickly turned to analyzing the politics behind it all, looking for a person to blame. It is not to say or suggest that the media shouldn't hold politicians accountable, or that we shouldn't try to make sense of it all from a political angle, but turning the coverage straight to the blame-game says it all about what the American media really prioritizes (Jones, 2022). In prominent news publications like the ones of the *Washington Post* or the *Atlantic*, the headlines pointed towards Biden to blame. In a *New York Post* article, Miranda Devine wrote an opinion-piece heavily criticizing Biden and on the other hand claiming that former President Donald Trump and his administration would have handled the situation better (Devine, 2021). The violence in Afghanistan where so many are suffering and experiencing their rights being stripped away from them should be covered and highlighted, not used as a means to further political ideologies. Yet, that's what we're seeing in American media. In the same article, Devine says that Afghanistan is a "godforsaken" country.

Narratives like these about Afghanistan aren't new or shocking. The American media has consistently and blatantly portrayed Afghanistan as an uncivilized and backwards country. In a *New York Times* article, Barry Bearak wrote, "if there are Americans clamoring to bomb Afghanistan back to the Stone Age, they ought to know that this nation does not have so far to

go. This is a post-apocalyptic place of felled cities, parched land and downtrodden people,” (Bearak, 2001). Articles like these normalize pro-war sentiments and justify the bombings of innocent civilians and children. Afghanistan has not received nearly the same amount of coverage as Ukraine has and continues to receive. In another part of the article, Bearak writes, “children play in vast ruins, their limbs sometimes wrenched away by remnant land mines” (Bearak, 2001). What we fail to recognize is the narrative in articles like these imply that things like war, violence, and conflict in Afghanistan and countries like Afghanistan are inevitable. The images and narratives of Afghan children playing in the ruins are normalized in the media which results in compassion fatigue and the West being desensitized to the suffering of people in “non-Western countries.” When it comes to Afghanistan and other “non-Western” countries, “most of the Western media has displayed a distinct lack of concern for people’s right to freedom, sovereignty, equality, justice, their right to have rights. This absence of coverage leaves their perpetrators off the hook, unaccountable for their atrocities and military occupation,” (Połńska-Kimunguyi, 2022). The Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) questions whether the world gives equal attention to Black and white lives (Połńska-Kimunguyi, 2022).

Western media has also played a large role in portraying Afghanistan, and other countries similar to Afghanistan as conflict-prone that further contributes to perpetuating narratives and stereotypes about “non-Western” countries, especially in the Middle East. Former President Trump’s Deputy National Security Advisor went on *Fox News* and claimed that the Middle East has been fighting for 4,000 years. She claimed that their “normal state of condition is war, and peace is when they have pause, regroup, fight again,” whereas in America, the default position is peace (Media Matters, 2022). The numbness to violence and the suffering of people in

“non-Western” countries is blatantly displayed in American media. As is the lack of knowledge of the history of the Middle East. When it comes to the coverage of Afghanistan, the voices that are largely being amplified aren’t Afghan. According to a Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) survey, *ABC World News Tonight*, *CBS Evening News*, and *NBC Nightly News* identified 74 sources in total. Out of those sources, 51 sources were Americans, who weren’t Afghan and had no other nationality represented. 16 of those sources were current or former military officials. Only 23 sources were Afghan or identified as Afghan American (Hollar, 2022).

Representation and Impact

The misperceptions and misrepresentation of Arabs by news correspondents “permeate their reports, policymakers’ crucial decisions may be influenced by those unrealistic perceptions, and the public stereotypical images may affect the formation and acceptance of policy” (Shaheen, p. 160, 1985). Consequently, political tensions have translated into cultural and societal effects. A FBI report claims that hate crimes against Arab and Muslim Americans have increased by 1,600 percent from 2000 to 2001 according to (Alsultany, p. 161, 2013). In general, “a distorted media image of the Arab people is becoming ingrained in American culture and continues to inhibit a resolution of the Middle East conflict” (Shaheen, p. 160, 1985). In an interview with NPR Egyptian Comedian Bassem Youssef says, “when I was watching people talking [about] the Middle East, they always talk about power struggle, but they don’t tell you how people get to power, how people convince millions of citizens to vote against their own interests or to believe in conspiracy theories. And I think the media is a huge factor in that” (Willett, Willett, 2019).

News coverage that pushes narratives of Afghanistan or other “non-Western” countries being conflict-prone is not only inaccurate, but it pushes the stereotype that war, conflict, and

violence in these countries are normal. It pushes the stereotype that people in these countries are aggressive. It perpetuates all of the negative stereotypes attached to the region and its people. This is not only harmful to people in these countries, it is also harmful to the people in the West consuming these types of news because it morphs their reality of these places, feeds them stereotypes, and further contributes to peoples' ignorance about foreign places and people. Coverage such as Devine's New York Post article which highlights politics and pushes pro-war sentiments are equally as harmful. They push political ideologies, prioritize the politics of the West, and justify bombing innocent civilians in the process. We've seen headlines that are centered around the West, coming from a Western perspective, for the people in the West rather than to shed light on the pressing issues in Afghanistan. For example, a *BBC* article titled its article, "Afghan war: Kabul's young women plead for help as Taliban advance". The article talks about how for 20 years the West has "inspired" and "financed" a new generation of Afghans to be able to grow up with freedom and opportunities (Hakim, 2021). Now that the West has left, these dreams have shattered. The issue with narratives like this one is that it is implying that the West's interference in Afghanistan was a good thing (Archer, 2021). It fails to highlight the issue with the U.S. being in Afghanistan in the first place. It is portraying the U.S. and other Western countries as saviors. Research has shown that no American print news presentation was free of values or preferences (Zelizer, p. 18 2002).

This thesis is not to say that American/Western media shouldn't be highlighting the atrocities of the Taliban regime. It's to shed light on the fact that we should be able to recognize that Afghanistan is effectively crumbling after the Taliban's rise to power while simultaneously recognizing the fact that the U.S. has contributed to this at the same time. One of the main principles of journalism that student journalists are taught is objective reporting. I am a firm

believer that journalism doesn't need to be neutral, contrary to what we've been often taught. But, it must be objective. It cannot depict one side of the story and portray one side as the savior when it has been complicit in the past. News coverage that pushes political ideologies also allows politicians to capitalize off of the horrific situation in Afghanistan for personal/political gain. For example, Hillary Clinton promised to defend the rights of the women in Afghanistan in 2010 when she was the Secretary of State (Archer, 2021). We've yet to see this happen. Headlines and coverage like these don't defend women's rights. It doesn't help women in Afghanistan. It only allows the West to capitalize on the pain and suffering of people in Afghanistan and other "non-Western" countries. Coverage that perpetuate the stereotypes of Afghans or others in "non-Western" countries being uncivilized, aggressive, violent impacts the Western world's openness and willingness to welcome them in cases of refugees or asylum seekers. Afghan refugees who are looking to flee violence and oppression are less likely to be accepted in comparison to Ukrainian refugees. According to the Washington Post research conducted by Empathy Research Lab, Americans are more favorable to Ukrainian refugees in comparison to Afghan refugees. The average feeling of value towards Ukrainian refugees was 77/100 while for Afghan refugees it was 63.7/100. (Adida, Lo, Platas, Prather, Williamson, 2022). The research also shows that Americans are more concerned that Afghan refugees won't adapt to customs and will engage in crimes (Adida, Lo, Platas, Prather, Williamson, 2022). The survey shows that respondents were more likely to cite concerns that refugees from Afghanistan would be a burden to the economy of the country because they will "take our jobs and social benefits" (Adida, Lo, Platas, Prather, Williamson, 2022). We see global compassion for Ukrainian refugees at a much higher rate than we do for Afghan refugees. For Afghan refugees, and refugees from other "non-Western" countries, we see indifference. The impacts of

misrepresentation and bias in coverage impacts every single aspect of the lives of Afghans and other people in the “non-Western” countries. It impacts their ability to flee violence. Their ability to be perceived as humans. Their ability to be treated as humans. Instead, their suffering and pain is normalized and dehumanized in the news.

Conclusion

Through research, it has been evident that there is implicit bias in the coverage of Western and “non-Western” countries. The way American media approaches war, conflict, and violence in these two regions are strikingly different which has a long-lasting impact on the lives of people from these regions. Research has been able to show that the coverage results in the global compassion we’ve seen for refugees from predominantly white, Western countries whereas lack of compassion for those in “non-Western” countries. It proves that accurate and complete coverage of war, conflict, and violence in developing, “non-Western” countries is even more crucial.

Observational Claims

Prior research on this topic points towards a bias existing in American media’s coverage. As mentioned above, I’ve found that there have been multiple examples of journalists in the West that have blatantly displayed bias and multiple examples of times where the Western media displayed bias in its coverage of Ukraine in comparison to its coverage of Afghanistan. Additionally, research has shown that American media has capitalized on the suffering and oppression of people in Afghanistan by making the coverage largely about American politics. My aim is to offer a broader perspective in the coverage of war, conflict, and violence in these regions and highlight the long-lasting impacts of inaccurate coverage.

Qualitative Data Analysis

In order to examine my research topic, I plan to utilize qualitative data. For my qualitative data, I plan on analyzing news articles. I will take approximately 15 news articles from mainstream American news publications that cover the war and violence in Afghanistan and record the number of times themes of “saving Afghanistan” or “Saving Afghan women” appear. The publications I chose for the purposes of this data analysis are: the *New York Times*, *BBC*, *Fox News*, *CNN*, *Wall Street Journal*, *National Public Radio*, *Politico* and *CNBC*. I will record the number of times the narratives of a U.S. victory or defeat, political blame-game, U.S. presence helping Afghan women, U.S. saving Afghanistan, Afghanistan/Afghan as victims/backward, Women’s rights under the Taliban, U.S. presence helpful and the term “desperate” while describing Afghans or Afghanistan appear. I have chosen these specific terms and concepts because it pushes a specific narrative about the war in Afghanistan and Afghans in general. After the analysis of the articles, I will set a threshold to determine the conclusion. If these key terms appear 51% of the time when each of the conflicts is being reported on, then I can sufficiently claim that it supports my hypothesis. I will draw from the conclusion of my research and support my conclusions by including graphs based on the statistics and data which I will collect from analyzing articles.

Interview

I plan to conduct interviews with journalists, from both Western and “non-Western” countries who have experience in covering Afghanistan and Ukraine, or other “non-Western” countries. In doing so, I believe I would be able to highlight the voices of journalists who are able to provide insightful critical feedback of U.S. media practices while covering these foreign countries and issues. Journalists, particularly American journalists in this case, have the most

relevant experience when it comes to reporting on Afghanistan so being able to highlight what they think American media has gotten right and what we could work on would be beneficial.

I plan on interviewing Victor Blue, who is a photojournalist whose work has been published in the *New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Wall Street Journal* and *Newsweek*, to name a few. He has been a photojournalist for approximately 20 years and first began covering Afghanistan back in 2009. My second source is Tara Pixley, who has previously worked as a photo editor for *CNN*, *Newsweek* and the *New York Times*. She is currently an associate professor of journalism at Loyola Marymount University in California. She has researched issues like representation in the media in the past, which allows her to provide insight both as a journalist and a scholar. Another source I have in mind is Pete Kiehart, who is currently in Ukraine covering the conflict there. In addition to covering the conflict in Ukraine, Kiehart has covered the refugee crisis in Europe in 2015. His experiences will provide insight as someone who has seen how refugees, mostly from “non-Western” countries, were covered in the media and treated by European countries in comparison to how he thinks Ukrainian refugees are covered and treated. While it is important to include the perspectives of American journalists that provide feedback about their own practices, it is equally important to provide perspectives from journalists in “non-Western” countries. Therefore, my fourth source is Yubakar Ghimire. He is a journalist from Nepal who has worked for *BBC Nepal*, *Telegraph Nepal* and *India Today*. I chose him as one of my sources because I believe his insight as a journalist in a “non-Western” country, with close proximity to Afghanistan, will provide a unique perspective to this research. My fifth source is Dr. Hun Shik Kim. He previously worked as a journalist for 15 years in South Korea and the U.S. He has traveled to India, Pakistan, Iraq and Sri Lanka to cover conflict, violence and other international issues. He is currently a professor of journalism at the University of Colorado

Boulder. His input as both a scholar and journalist will add meaningful and unique perspectives to my creative project. My final source for this project will be Kristina Berdinskykh who previously worked as the political editor for *New Voice of Ukraine* magazine and now works as a freelance journalist. Her perspective not only as a journalist but also as a civilian in Ukraine will offer an intriguing perspective to add to this research.

Logistics

I plan on displaying my project on a website. The website will allow me to present a range of perspectives from journalists and scholars that highlight the main points of my thesis. On the website, I plan to display the clips of the video interview after I conduct them, highlighting powerful, meaningful quotes by my sources. In addition to this, I plan on displaying an infographic of the brief analysis I will conduct. To summarize, I will have my creative project, literature review, multimedia and a self-reflection section displayed on my website.

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